

Dr. A. L. E. CROUTER v. President E. M. GALLAUDET.

[*The Hartford Times, Wednesday, May 19, 1897.*]

LETTERS FROM THE PEOPLE.

ORAL AND SIGN LANGUAGE.

To the Editor of the Times:

My attention has been called to the following statement concerning the oral work of this institution, made by President E. M. Gallaudet, of Gallaudet College, Washington, D. C., in an address before the committee on humane institutions of the Connecticut General Assembly, and reported in your issue of April 8, 1897, page 8 :

“ The oral schools claim that they use no signs ; that they have no manual methods in conversing at all. Not very long ago I was visiting the oral department of an institution at Philadelphia, the Mt. Airy School, a very large and well-conducted institution. It is a combined-system school, by the way, and it has oral and manual departments, but they are separate. In the oral department of this school I had an opportunity of witnessing an illustration of what was called ‘ oral dictation ; ’ that is to say, the teacher was dictating orally to her pupils, and they were writing on a slate exactly the words she uttered to them. I was very much surprised and not a little pleased to see, while she was doing that, at the same time she made signs which Professor Bell calls ‘ French signs.’ They were not French signs ; there is no such thing. I have been to France, and have talked with people there, and they made their signs and I made my signs, and mine were as much French as theirs, and their signs were as much American as mine. But, in this class, this teacher, while she was giving an oral dictation, made the Abbe de l’Epée signs at the same time ; the principal offered no objection ; I made no criticism. I was glad to see that in this oral department they were making some use of the features of the manual method, because I felt it was

easier for the children ; it was better for their development ; it was kinder to them. I made no criticism upon it ; I made a mental note that if that was done in one case, there was a strong probability that it was done in others ; and I made a second mental note that the claim by these pure oral schools for the deaf, that no signs were used, and that they were not obliged to use them, is not true."

Now, while I have no desire to enter upon a discussion of the relative merits of the methods of instruction pursued in the various schools for the deaf in this country, those at Hartford and Mystic included, this statement by President Gallaudet concerning the work of the oral department of this school contains such glaring errors that I have to ask space at your hands for its correction. The visit referred to by President Gallaudet occurred in the spring of 1893. At that time the oral work of the school was conducted in one department, under the immediate direction of Miss F. C. McDowell, principal. Miss McDowell, as principal, accompanied Dr. Gallaudet on his visit to the various classes, and regarding the use of signs as referred to by him, in a note to me, says : " I distinctly recall the visit he (President Gallaudet) refers to, and was with him the entire time of his stay, and wish to say that neither on that occasion nor on any other did I see signs made as stated by Dr. Gallaudet in his address before the committee on humane institutions of the Connecticut General Assembly."

There were at that time but two lady teachers in the department who had knowledge of the Abbe de l'Épée signs. One of them, Mrs. E. G. Hurd, now an instructor in the Morganton, North Carolina, School for the Deaf, in reply to a letter from me upon the subject, says : " I cannot distinctly recall Dr. Gallaudet's visit at the time you mention, nor am I able to connect myself with a dictation exercise given in his presence, but I can say positively that if I did give such an exercise before him, or any one else, I did not accompany the spoken words by de l'Épée signs, or any

other signs. I did not while in the Mt. Airy School use signs in teaching an oral class, nor do I do so now." The other, Miss Kate Landis, still a teacher in this school, says : "Dr. Gallaudet has never been in my class-room, nor, so far as I know, has he ever seen any of my class-work. I have never used signs in my school work since leaving the manual department in the winter of 1893, February."

Thus positively do the principal, and the only two lady teachers in the oral department of this school, capable of using de l'Epée signs, at the time of his visit, deny President Gallaudet's statement. I will simply say in addition that the use of Abbe de l'Epée signs, as described by Dr. Gallaudet, by any teacher of the oral department of this institution would furnish grounds for his or her prompt dismissal. The language of signs is not used in the oral department of this institution. It is not used even in the manual department. Experience has proven its use unnecessary ; the spoken, or written, or spelled word is made to take its place, and is found to be amply sufficient for all purposes of instruction or communication. What I have said relative to the non-use of the language of signs in the oral department of this school may, with equal force, be said of all other properly conducted oral schools in the country. Dr. Gallaudet's dicta regarding oral methods of teaching the deaf are to be taken with much allowance. Wedded all his life to sign methods, he is not to be considered an impartial judge of the spirit and scope of oral methods. He has never in any proper or just sense made American oral schools a subject of attentive study ; indeed, it is greatly to be doubted if he has ever given three consecutive hours to any candid examination of their merits.

Respectfully yours,

A. L. E. CROUTER,

Superintendent.

MOUNT AIRY, PHILADELPHIA,

May 13, 1897.

